

= VOLUME 45 / ISSUE 5

Dedicated to the Ideals and Comradeship
We knew in Wars and Peace and in
Our services both Home and Abroad



THE GROUNDSHEET

THE OFFICIAL PUBLICATION OF

THE ROYAL WESTMINSTER REGIMENT ASSOCIATION
P.O. BOX 854, NEW WESTMINSTER, B.C. V3L 4Z8



Jerry Gangur, President 2015 Hyannis Drive, North Vancouver, B.C. V7H 2E5 929-5785
C. (Chuck) Smithers, Treasurer 670 Appian Way, Coquitlam, B.C. V3S 2A9 581-6373
Ron Hurley, Editor 2229 Bonnyvale, Vancouver, B.C. V5P 2G4 321-8464

EDITOR'S CORNER **"REFLECTIONS ON A RIVER"**

My requests, for personal memories of the Melfa 1944 drew a complete blank with but one exception and that from my Platoon Officer Art Miller. I thought I would express some of my own. They are most certainly not of any more importance than others but it is what I recall and because I was a section leader in Art's 12 Platoon, I will try not to be a mirror image of his remarks. I apologise to Art for downsizing his remarks but I know he realizes the limited space we have available. Personally I believe we all shared some very common feelings - apprehension, curiosity, adrenalin, fear & hope. We all realized that 'The Old Foot Slogger's' area of battle rarely exceeded 100 yards in all directions. Even The Coy Cmdrs knowledge was far removed from the Pin Pushers in the rear with their colorful maps. This is not a condemnation, simply a fact. Among my many memories is the fact that The Battle of The Melfa did not end on 24th of May. May 25th saw us replicating a W.W. 1 type of advance - four companies in line abreast advancing through a field of poppies. We struggled forward with C.Coy 12 Platoon at the apex of this unusual formation approx. 1,000 yds north of the original Melfa Bridgehead. We were stopped cold under a mammoth & murderous 'Stonk'. Our 75 Hawkins Grenades - (hardly capable of blowing a tire off a bike), resulted in a handful of dry scorched earth. Our casualties mounted alarmingly and under a merciless searing sun we took this pounding for 7 hours; The Irish Regt were suffering similar difficulties. Perhaps, among a host of memories, is that of the gallantry of 'C' Sqdn, The B.C. Dragoons. With little or no cogent order or direction they set forth with 9 tanks to relieve the battered Infantry from their long ordeal. In minutes 7 Tanks were hit and six were ablaze and one appeared to be disabled. I shall never forget the one tank that got within a few feet of our slit trenches before it too was torched...a Tankman, clothing on fire, was hanging from the turret ring; Pte C.L. Lewis of 12 Pltn reached him first and lowered him to the ground. He hollered repeatedly "Get Clear, Get Clear, It's going to Blow' It did indeed Blow & several of our men were wounded from the exploding Tank Hulk. I, with others, checked the severely burnt Tank Man. He was quiet now, horribly burned and unconscious. I checked his Dog Tags; He was a Sgt Singbeil and I knew him from Militia Days. I had last seen him at Militia Camp in Vernon in June 1939. What a strange twist of fate — I had started my Military life in C Sqdn B.C.D's in Penticton and had been among the first of underaged volunteers for Bridge Guard Duty on 26 Aug, 1939 at Pr. George B.C., still a member of C Sqdn B.C.D., we stayed there until mid Dec. then were told to come home. Had the B.C.D's mobilized I would have stayed there. We did not go home and managed to be convincing enough to be accepted by The Westminster Regt. (M.G.) That gallant Sgt survived his terrible burns only to die from them in Jan. 1945. Fate moves in many ways — I have many memories but on this 50th Anniversary I salute The B.C.D's and especially their 'C' Sqdn and the brave Sgt Singbeil. Fate dealt a rotten hand to C.L. Lewis who had got him free from his tank. He was killed in The Gothic Line. Memories like this are everlasting.

R.H., Editor

PRESIDENT'S REPORT

Cooperation and Progress has been behind the success we have had with our association this year. We are fortunate to have had another year where the executive and directors worked together as a team to achieve worthy long term benefits for the Association.

We can look forward to a more active participation by members of the serving battalion, particularly as elected directors of our Association and as contributors to our Groundsheet. With the concurrence of our Editor, the serving unit has been challenged to fill four pages of the Groundsheet with news of the happenings within the Regiment. We will be requesting positions of associate editors be filled by unit members.

The Editor of our Groundsheet, Ron Hurley, has done some marvelous work over the years past. He will be invited to continue his good work and we truly hope he agrees to continue to serve. The quality of the content of our Groundsheet has never been in question. The basic format and layout has been the sole responsibility of the Editor. It is our goal, as we become financially secure, to help the editor get his message across by improving the quality of presentation. The March issue of the Groundsheet was our first attempt at improving the presentation. We hope that with each issue, some little improvements will be added.

Our fundraising drive is well underway and we have raised approximately \$25,000. Our goal of raising \$100,000 is attainable, but will require the continual attention of our Fundraising Committee. Our first step, of establishing a fund with Vancouver Foundation has been met and we can only ask for continued support in our fundraising. Members are reminded that donations can be made directly to Vancouver Foundation with the stipulation that funds be credited to The Royal Westminster Regiment Endowment Fund.

Plans commemorating the 50th Anniversary of the battle of Melfa River are well underway and will take place this May 20-22 at the Royal Towers Hotel in New Westminster. A large turnout is expected for these events.

In the last issue of the Goundsheet, mention was made of the appointment by Her Majesty, the Queen, of His Grace, the Duke of Westminster as our Regiment's Colonel-in-Chief. We share in the pride the Regiment draws from this unique appointment.

The Regiment has changed command, with LCol R.A. Lee succeeding LCol W.A. White. To one CO we give thanks for and acknowledge a job well done. To the other CO, we welcome him aboard and we know his performance in office will be up to true Westie standards.

If my term in office can be attributed with any modest degree of success and accomplishment, I can only say were it not for the general support of the executive and directors, and for the very specific support of some very key individuals, my successes would not have been realized.

I would like to address my concluding remarks to all those who have contributed to our Future Fund. Through your donations, you have said a lot. Some of you have approached me individually with your donations. Others have written some kind words and others expressed reservations and still made donations. The most important step we have taken is to ensure that principal created by your donated funds cannot be eroded by any executive in the years ahead. Lack of funds will not be responsible for lack of future success and the continuity of our Association.

Thank you for your support this last year.

Jerry N. Gangur. President

COMMANDING OFFICER'S REPORT

Since my last report in March '93 the Regiment's role has undergone some significant changes notably creation of what is called a Total Force Infantry Battalion (TFIB). This will allow for a full equipped Infantry Battalion to be mobilized from companies from each of the R Westmr R, RM Rang, Seaforth of C and the C Scot R. In addition to providing a fully equipped company we are tasked to provide an anti-tank platoon which will be equipped with the Tow 2 Missile. Unfortunately the unit has lost its airborne role and designation.

Continuing on from last year, Westies continued to serve in UN Peacekeeping duties in the former Yugoslavia. December '93 saw the end of ROTO 2 with 2 PPCLI. Twelve Westies completed their tour, fortunately without injuries. They were:

Sgt Buryniuk	Cpl Malish
Mcpl Harrington	Cpl O'Mara
Mcpl Lowe	Cpl Scott
Mcpl Stephenson	Cpl Stearn
Sgt Setter	Cpl Steward
Cpl Badgley	Cpl Syverson

In December '93 ROTO 4 began with 1 PPCLI. Eight Westies are currently undergoing training in Calgary and California in preparation for deployment. They are:

Cpl Duff	Pte Ensor
Cpl Hammng	Pte Hellewell
Cpl Janek	Pte Krezymon
Pte Antolinos	Pte Thomas

Please accept my best wishes for a successful Melfa Reunion and thank you for the good work you are doing for the Regiment.

Lieutenant Colonel R.A. Lee
Commanding Officer

Colonel W.E. McKinney,
Honourary Colonel,
The Royal Westminster Regiment

Dear Ron,

His Grace, Duke of Westminster, has agreed to a tentative schedule as follows for his fall visit.

Sept. 29 (Thursday) 8:45 p.m. — Regimental Parade

Sept. 30 Visit Fraser Valley - Aldergrove, Chilliwack, Matsqui & Mission
2000 Hrs. — Mess Dinner with serving officers

Oct. 1 (Sat.) 10:00 am — Cadets, Soldiers, families & guests
Informal Day & meet members of Regimental Family

Hope to see members of the Association during his visit.

Yours truly,

Col W.E. McKinney

MEMORIES OF THE MELFA 1944 by H.A. (Art) Miller

I was a platoon Lt with Major Ian Douglas's C Coy on that unforgettable Melfa Battle 24/25 May 1944 in which "A" Coy Major Jack Mahony won the Victoria Cross. 50 years is a long time but some incidents are indelibly etched in my mind.....

I recall being at the start line before crossing when heavy machine gun fire forced us to hit the ground — I can still hear the bullets thudding into a tree, where I sought refuge ... fortunately for the platoon their aim was high and we suffered no casualties at this point ... I remember that we had lost signals communication and were forced to use personnel runners between our platoon and Coy H.Q. I could see the enemy tanks on the high north banks of the Melfa: They were very close and had we continued on this line of march — it would surely have been suicidal. A somewhat amusing incident (albeit serious), took place at this spot. Our Q.M. Sgt arrived with a piat gun and assuming the prone position attempted to engage the enemy tank — he lost sighting from this position and he stood up and placed the piat gun in the crook of nearby apple tree. His view improved, only to note the rumbling panther rolling towards him and firing rapidly. He left the piat dangling in the tree and beat a hasty retreat to his pltn. I returned to my 12 platoon and was informed to move from this ominous disaster area to the center and proceed along A Coy's designated bridgehead across the river. The Melfa seemed to be a rather insignificant river approx 80 yds wide. I thought that the water level was quite shallow (as it was in most spots) but noticed a pool at our crossing spot. I went forward with confidence only to sink up to my armpits. One of my Sgts was toting extra 2 in mortar shells adding an additional 90 lbs. above his normal equipment. Inadvertently he plunged into this pacific looking pool and burdened by the extra weight went right to the bottom and was soon thrashing desperately to avoid drowning ... I rushed to his aid - got him back on his feet and we scrambled up the steep embankment without further incidents. The first thing I saw was the stolid figure of Jack Mahony strolling nonchalantly as if nothing was happening. He was wounded, many of his men dead or wounded. He was pleased to have extra men to help hold his hard won bridgehead. Meanwhile the vastly superior enemy armour was literally pouring every type of shot and shell in an unrelenting downpour on to the men holding on to this vital bridgehead. Jack Mahony's V.C. for this action served to remind me these 50 years later we were fortunate to have had such capable leadership and such courageous troops - Thank You Art Miller.

MELFA - 94
May 20, 21 and 22
PROGRAM

FRIDAY

Friday, May 20th, our Association will pay tribute to The Westminster Regiment and its predecessors at the Royal Towers Hotel Ballroom. The Friday evening program will be open to the general public and will commence at 8 pm sharp.

A TRIBUTE TO THE REGIMENT

Program Events

- a. President's welcome and opening remarks.
- b. History of The Regiment
- c. Outline of the regiment's contribution to UN peacekeeping
- d. Victoria Cross Tribute
 - History - Jimmy Oldfield
 - Cpl P. Konowal, V.C. — Jimmy Oldfield
 - Maj JK Mahony, V.C. — Peter Stursberg
- e. Honourary Colonel — Appointment of Colonel-in-Chief
- f. Closing Remarks — President

Master of Ceremony — Vernon Ardagh

No Admission Charge — Bring Family & Friends

Saturday

GOLF: "Melfa at the Delta" - South across Alex Fraser Bridge to Hwy. 10.
Turn left, then first turn to right.

Tee off 12 pm - noon

Cost \$35 per golfer

DINNER & COCKTAILS: 5 pm Group Photograph (*In the Armoury*)
6 pm Cocktails
7 pm Dinner
9 pm Dancing

Cost: \$25. per person

Sunday

BRUNCH: Royal Towers Hotel

Timings: 10 am - 2 pm

Courtesy: The Royal Westminster Regiment Historical Society

HOUSE KEEPING - MELFA WEEKEND

Accommodation:

Special room rates available at the Royal Towers Hotel. Please identify yourself as a member of our Association. **Toll Free Reservations: 1-800-663-0202.** (Rate: \$59 plus taxes)

Group Photograph:

We will arrange to take a group photograph of all members of the Association attending the Dinner. This will include all, veterans, post war soldiers and members of the current unit.

WHERE: The Armoury 5 p.m.

Cost: The photograph will be published in the Fall issue of the Groundsheet. Should you wish to purchase a photograph, we will make one available for \$15. We will try to have a photo available for viewing at the Sunday brunch.

Speakers Corner:

If you want to say anything at the dinner, perhaps a few words about your wartime experience, please let us know and you will have that opportunity.

Dinner Seating:

This year we will have a sit down dinner and we will have tables of 8. Seating will be on an as you chose basis, but if you are coming with your family or a group that will make up 8, then let us know and we will seat you together.

D-DAY DODGERS DESERVE SALUTE, FORMER ENEMY SAYS

By Tom McDougall
Canadian Press

Halifax - With so much glory going to D-Day — the Allied landing in Normandy — on this 50th anniversary year, Bob Dietz thinks Canadians who fought in Italy aren't getting the attention they deserve.

He finds that a shame because the Germans found Canadians in Italy a remarkably tough enemy.

Dietz should know. He was a German artillery officer, directing howitzer fire on the Allies in Italian places such as Rimini, as well as on the Russian and German fronts.

Now 69 and still carrying a heavy accent from his home in Rhine-Mosel, Dietz emigrated to Canada in 1951 and joined the Canadian navy as a musician with the Stadacona Band.

He went on to become an artist and art-gallery owner. Now retired, he wrote an autobiography, *Oath of Allegiance*, about the horrors of war, and recently finished a play, *Gunner Schmidt at the Crossroads*, based on the book.

Veterans of the Italian campaign have long grumbled that the bloody mountain battles they endured have received scant attention because D-Day got it all.

Dietz says it started with Lady Astor's comment at the time that they were sunning themselves in Italy while boys were dying on the Normandy beaches.

But at Monte Cassino alone, almost 105,000 Allied soldiers and 80,000 Germans died.

With proud irony, veterans of Italy then started calling themselves the D-Day Dodgers.

Dietz, who recalls his German general commenting on the toughness of Canadian and Gurkha soldiers, says the Dodgers saved D-Day.

"My point is the Italian campaign is just as important as D-Day. The fact is they kept two German armies tied up — over 20 divisions with over 300,000 soldiers.

"If they had been free at the landing, can you imagine? D-Day may have become another Dieppe disaster. That is why I'm saying don't forget the D-Day Dodgers."

The Veterans Affairs Department is organizing a pilgrimage for Italy veterans in May, similar to one being held for France on the D-Day anniversary June 6.

FROM THE POST

A poignant letter and kind donation from Willa Robinson who honors us and the memory of her late husband 'Robbie Robinson' who passed away some 27 years ago. Such memory is a fine tribute indeed and yes, Willa, we have not forgotten him. A donation, and change of address of old friend Ted Usher, now of #206-615 7th Ave., New Westminster, B.C. V3M 2J1. Thank you re the kind remarks re the Editor — I agree, Ted, the laser printing is an improvement but the 'Anemic' looking 'Buster Beaver' logo will be restored to its original appearance A.S.A.P. Dues and a donation from loyal and long time Assn Member Don Drummond — trust you can make the 50th Anniversary activities. Kind words and a donation from ex Sgt Fred Murray re 'Future Fund' It is well on its way, Fred. A thank you to Neil Crawford re his confirmation of attendance of Melfa 94. Out of the past of 'DUNDURN'S sands comes word from K47170 Murray Fairweather, note that you were in 8 Platoon B Coy but 54 years is a long time since you left us in Dundurn 1940.

As always a most interesting letter from Geo Bayne of Antigonish N.S. plus a generous donation for the Endowment fund. Thank you for your concern re my health — I can tell you that it has been a rocky 3 years. I do not plan to give up the Editorship yet - at least as long as the Members and the Directors still want me. I can tell you George that as long as my health allows me - I shall continue. It has always been a personal pleasure over the many long years to receive your letters — It has been my sincere hope that one day you might make the long trek westward. We trust you and your family are well and I share your sadness re our fast depleting numbers. Sincere thanks to Frank Johnson ex B Coy Scout Pltn. for a fine letter and in particular for the article you enclosed. We 'D' Day Dodgers could use a little praise. Sorry to hear of your Leukemia, Frank — have been battling a less severe type myself for 3 years. As you say we can only hope for a better tomorrow. Glad you visited with Ginter-Hes an old original and a grand fellow. I hope the Ron Jeeves you mentioned gets in touch with the Assoc. Glad to hear that you have fond memories of Melfa 1993 and you will be thinking of us on this 50th anniversary in 1994. Your best wishes to "Good Old Dick Armstrong" are duly noted. Warmest appreciation to the Guest family advising us of the death of Thomas Guest — We extend our heartfelt condolences. A word from Axel Kruse who came to the unit from 72-L, A.D. You should have received the information you requested and we are delighted to have you join us. Thanks to Bill Jasman for donation and kind remarks. Appreciation to Walt McEvel and Norm Palmer is duly noted re your membership card and The Groundsheet. Nice to hear from an old C Coy Stalward in person of Geo McDonald. Thanks for the kind donation George and would like to see you down our way on this 50th Anniversary of Melfa. A letter, written in his usual grand style, from one of the more favored Coy Commanders, Ian Douglas. Because it was addressed to PRES JERRY, I have turned it over to Jerry Gangur in person. I can tell you Ian that your thoughts are almost a mirror image of my own. A kind letter plus a donation from Marjorie Hussey advising us of the death of her husband Wilfred Hussey. Your thoughtfulness is most appreciated Marjorie. Thanks to F. Whitford for your kind remarks and generous donation. Donation and clarification re his recent donation from Bill Jasman. I am sure Chuck has advised you of the proper corrections thereto — but please

FROM THE POST continued

accept our collective apologies. Sincere appreciation to J.E. Wilson for his kind donation re 'Future Fund'. You epitomize the 'Old W.W.2 Westies' who have always responded to our requests. Thank you Ross Douglas, your dues and remarks duly noted and appreciated. A word from Assn. stalwart Jack Terpenning of Victoria. Your request re Malcolm Flewelling of Dartmouth, Nova Scotia has been directed to Membership Committee and properly dealt with. Hope to meet you at Commonwealth Games this August - also Billy Armour. I have already paid for 1st class tickets to all stadium events. I shall have to come over for a recon re accommodations. Health permitting I shall be there — meanwhile a personal thank you to you and Billie Armour for all you have done for the Assoc. whenever requested. A most interesting letter from George Shaw of Edmonton. Geo as a member of R.C.C.S. (signals who was attached to "A" Coy.) Regret your admission in War Diary along with Capt Coldicotts. We regret things of that nature but they were unavaoidable. The War Diary was fully paid for by Assoc. members and without the extensive contributions of Vern Ardagh and Jimmy Oldfield it might never have reached printing stage; Obviously we were, at the time, literally operating on a shoe string and in hindsight we should have expanded it. Your remarks re Melfa 1944 are noted and we welcome your membership. A letter and request from Mike Kedziora; sincere thanks to you Mike for your generous donations, most appreciated. (I wonder if you remember me from Penticton B.C. where I left school and was on duty as Bridge Guard with 'C' Sqdn B.C.D's on 26th Aug 1939). There is now a reference re that service in The Penticton Museum; Thank you again and trust you and your family are all well. Special appreciation to Ed Shannon (a former hardworking Editor of your Groundsheet). Your extremely kind personal remarks re my Editorship are most flattering and am looking forward to hearing from you re Melfa 1944. I suppose IT'S THE IRISH IN US that makes us put PEN TO PAPER. Some call it BLARNEY - one of the more polite terms we of Irish heritage usually hear — Trust your health is improving Ed.

A warm note from Rhonda Hall citing a duplication I had made in The Memoriam section. Thank you Rhonda for making me aware and you have my sincere apologies — Thank you also for your kind donation. I shall try to be more careful in the future. Have received word that Les Deane has agreed to underwrite the gifts which will be offered to ALL who attend the Melfa '94 Anniversary Dinner. The Association is most grateful for your thoughtful generosity.

HOFFY'S MIGHTY MAROON MACHINE

This became the much quoted title of 5th Can Armoured Div led by Maj. Gen. Bert Hoffmeister. Undoubtedly a most capable leader and on this, the 50th Anniversary of the Melfa crossing, the "Westies" of that memorable May 24, 1944 salute him and are aware of his personal presence at "O" groups with unit commanders of The Westminster's & The Strathconas in that hard fought struggle to secure and hold a bridgehead thus maintaining the advance evolving from 1st Div's costly breaking of the vaunted Hitler line at Pontecorvo. He more than deserved the many accolades accorded to him:

"Maj. Gen. Bert Hoffmeister — certainly Canada's best fighting General of W.W. 2" — *J.L. Granastein, Author of "The Generals"*.

"This was a man who knew how to lead and the Mighty Maroon Machine, 5th Canadian Armoured Division, was the only division in the Canadian army that had an identity and pride of its own." — *J. Granatstein, "The Generals"*

Lately we have heard from the Seaforth Association that "Hoffy" is not too well. We would like him to know that the 'Westies' of 1944, the Royal Westminster Regiment Association and the entire Royal Westminster Regiment family salute him and wish him improved health.

It was a pleasure to have served with you.

Ex Sgt Westminster Regt (M) Ron Hurley Editor

THE ROYAL WESTMINSTER REGIMENT ASSOCIATION MELFA 94 RESERVATIONS — *Cut out and return*

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MELFA 1994 - May 20, 21 and 22

DINNER: \$25.00 per person — Sunday Social - No Charge

DINNER: 1, 2, 3 or 4 x \$25.00 _____

GOLF: \$35 per golfer _____

SUNDAY SOCIAL: 1, 2, 3 or 4 N/C _____

NAME (Please Print) _____

DEADLINE: May 13th, 1994

SEND TO: Melfa Chairman — Chuck Smithers
P.O. Box 854
New Westminster, B.C.
V3L 4Z8

Thank You.

IN MEMORIAM

Norm Brault Westminster Regt. (MOTOR) W.W. 2
George Hamilton B Coy Westminster Regt. W.W.2
Dominic Picone Westminster Regt. W.W.2
Wilf Hussey Westminster Regt. W.W.2
Thomas Guest Westminster Regt. W.W.2

APPEAL FROM VERNON ARDAGH

Who has Brig Sager's Films?

Notify Association A.S.A.P.

MELFA 94 RESERVATIONS

Cut out this portion and return **PROMPTLY** with particulars to

.....

Melfa 94 Chairman
P.O. Box 854
New Westminster, B.C.
V3L 4Z8

Plan to attend and bring as many 'Westies' you can persuade.

Family and Friends welcomed for this 50th Dinner.

Cheque payable to The Royal Westminster Regiment Association.

*Fiftieth Anniversary
Melfa River Crossing
1944 - 1994*



The Royal Westminster Regiment Association

*Saturday May 21st, 1994
The Royal Towers Hotel
New Westminster, B.C.*

Menu

Garden Green Salad



*Roast Prime Rib of Beef
Au Jus*



*Yorkshire Pudding
Roast Potato*



*Honey Glazed Carrots
Fresh Rolls & Butter*



*Chocolate Terrine with
Fruit Coulis*



Coffee • Tea